

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street- Phoenix AZ 85012
Thursday - October 11, 2007

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Dingwall.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Tom Dingwall, Chairman
Kenneth Yamanouchi
Gary Fredericks
Phillip Quochytewa
Webb Ellis
Tom Heaney
Larry McKim
Linda Fulkerson

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Gregg Maxon, Director
Dave Hampton, Public Affairs Officer
Lee Borgen, Vets' Benefit Counselor

Absent

Bill Lunsford

Guest

Bob Bohach
Mrs. Quochytewa

Opening – Chairman Dingwall welcomed Robert “Bo” Bohach and Mrs. Barbara Quochytewa. Vice Chair Yamanouchi moved to approve the minutes of the September 13, 2007 meeting subject to corrections; seconded by Heaney; unanimously approved.

Correspondence Sent and Received – none

Director's Report – Director Maxon

- Director Maxon passed out a sheet with 5 imperatives for the Agency for the FY 07-08.
 1. Establish and maintain operational and fiscal stability for the State Veteran Home
 - It is operating well, but finances are a concern.
 - The number of residents living at the Home is down to 182 from an average census of 190-195, so revenue is down.
 - Accounts Receivables are more than \$2 million, about \$1.2 million of which is owed by AHCCCS (Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System). A letter has been sent to AHCCCS requesting timely payment of bills. This problem should be resolved within the next thirty days.
 2. Grow the client base of the Fiduciary section
 - The legislature gave us additional money this year.
 - Fiduciary currently serves approximately 300 clients. The target is to have a client base of around 450. Efforts to increase the client load are in process.
 3. Hire, train and place the newly authorized Veterans' Benefits Counselors
 - VBCs are being hired in increments of three or four at a time.
 - We may temporarily hold some vacancies to ease the budget crunch.

4. Develop and implement an aggressive Veterans' Business program
 - There are numerous federal programs to support disabled-veteran-owned (DVOB) businesses, and a certain percentage of DVOB businesses are targeted to supply goods and services to federal agencies nationwide.
 - The Veterans' Research Council recommended a similar purchasing program be adopted by the State of Arizona.
 - Most of these business owners do not identify themselves as "disabled vets" which makes it difficult to locate them. They are not aware that they may be entitled to VA disability benefits or aware of other Federal programs designed specifically for them.
 - New Mexico has an aggressive program of finding disabled veteran business owners and connecting them with Federal programs. New Mexico holds seminars on how to do business with the Federal Government, providing benefits counselors on site to file claims for people to get them into the disability system.
 - Identifying and bringing disabled veteran business owners into the Federal system has a huge potential, bringing more Federal dollars into the state's economy. We are going to partner with the Dept of Commerce, Small Business Administration and other key players to develop a similar program for Arizona.
5. Aggressively pursue certification of governmental and private sector training programs for GI Bill approval
 - ADVS is the certifying agency for education and training in Arizona. The State Approving Agency (SAA) can determine if a program is eligible for GI Bill participation.
 - The SAA is working to certify more education and training entities such as police, sheriff, and firefighter academies.
 - Employers can offer employees GI Bill benefits for basic, field and refresher training if their training program are approved by the SAA.
 - An approved program enhances their recruiting capability.
 - About one-half of eligible veterans are using their GI Bill benefits.
 - There are misconceptions and provided an example from Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma. They thought that using the GI Bill for their firefighters, plumbers and special training programs was "double dipping," rather than accessing an earned benefit that is separate from the salaries veterans are paid for doing their jobs. Putting money into the veterans' pockets is money that enriches the state and benefits everyone.
- Budget
 - The State has projected a \$100 million shortfall for the FY07-08 budget year. All state agencies have been asked to identify potential budget cuts and ADVS has been asked to plan for a cut of \$500,000.
 - VSD may temporarily hold a few VBC positions vacant, but there will be no compromise on service to rural areas.
 - There will be temporary delays to some scheduled improvements in the Home that are not health and welfare issues.
- Enduring Freedom Memorial
 - Design of the memorial and criteria for including names on the memorial have been established.
 - The new date for dedication is November 2008, allowing adequate time for all controversies to be addressed and resolved.
- Carillons
 - A carillon will be dedicated at the Phoenix VA National Cemetery, and is tentatively slated for December. The project is completely funded. Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV) in general and Mel Brody in particular have been and continue to be excellent fundraisers for the carillon.
 - The carillon for the State Cemetery in Sierra Vista is targeted for 2009. The national headquarters of AMVETS pays half of the overall cost and the other half must be

raised locally. ADVS and the veterans' organizations are working to raise necessary funding.

- Troops to Teachers
 - The program is managed by Department of Defense (DOD) and the Dept. of Education and supports military personnel transitioning to civilian life. The GI Bill pays for training and certification; and DOD pays an additional bonus if the teacher agrees to work in an under-served school district. DOD has decided not to renew its contract with the Colorado Department of Education, so Colorado asked Arizona to assume management of the program for Arizona and New Mexico. ADVS will be working closely with New Mexico to ensure the program continues.
- Helmets to Hard Hats Program
 - This is similar to the Troops to Teachers program, and helps service personnel who want to enter construction trades upon discharge. The program will be coming to Arizona and will presumably be administered by the Dept. of Commerce.
- State Veteran Home – Tucson
 - Arizona is 86th on the VA's list of construction projects to be funded in Category One. The projects on the list are diverse and are not limited to veteran homes. Arizona ranks 35 on the VA's list for renovation of the Phoenix Home.
 - The US House put \$250 million in the budget for state veteran home projects but the US Senate recommended only \$70 million. The total amount of the budget will determine how quickly the Tucson Vet Home will be built.
 - The State made a \$10 million commitment for the Tucson home. That commitment expires this year and the Tucson Vet Home is probably 2 to 4 years from starting construction. It is unlikely that the \$10 million will be renewed considering the current budget situation.
 - The Tucson Vet Home should not be a replica of the Phoenix Home. The agency will work closely with the VAMC in Tucson as it identifies who should be using the Tucson Veteran Home. The VAMC in Tucson has been designated as one of the few Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) specialty sites in the country. The Vet Home could support the VAMC's TBI mission by providing limited housing for that type of patient.
 - The Tucson Veteran Home continues to be a high priority for the Governor, which will certainly help.
- Per diem
 - Since the Commissioners are paid travel and per diem for the Commission meetings, the Home can not legally provide free food (such as donuts, fruit, etc). If food is to be provided at future meetings, the cost must be paid by the Commissioners or the per diem payment must be withheld. If the Commissioners request lunch, a nominal fee will be charged for the meal.

Educational Benefits Counselling

- Commissioner Fredericks asked about the outcome of an issue discussed in the December 2006 meeting regarding with educational benefit entitlements.
- The VA delegates the authority to provide educational benefit information to the various educational institutions where students apply. Unfortunately, the institutions are primarily interested in enrolling the veterans in their own facility and not providing all alternatives to the veteran. ADVS received a written opinion from the Attorney General's office to accept the VA's explanation, even though the information received by the veteran may be inadequate.

Strategic Plan for the Commission

- Chairman Dingwall asked the Commissioners to review its March 2005 Strategic Plan, in light of the “5 Imperatives” provided by the Director. He asked the commissioners to review the strategic plan and consider how it supports ADVS goals, and will include discussion on the December agenda.
- Commissioner Fredericks appreciated the Director’s efforts in keeping the Commission apprized of the Agency’s status, but noted that the Advisory Commission is charged with advising the Director. To that end, he suggested that the Commission provide advice on prioritization and implementation of these 5 imperatives. He further suggested that the Commission consider analyzing recommendations from the Research Counsel and offering advice to the Director regarding those recommendations.
- Vice Chair Yamanouchi concurred that the Commission’s goals need to be revisited. He also offered to assist the Agency in the area of financial and operational management of the Home, based on his experience running health care organizations and evaluating long term care facilities.
- Commissioner Fulkerson also agreed that it would be helpful to reexamine the Commission’s role.

Legal counsel for Commissioners

- The Assistant Attorney General, Jeff Dollins, will be at the December meeting to explain Arizona’s open meeting law. After his overview, the Commission will go into Executive Session so that the Commissioners may receive legal advice and counsel. The session provides an opportunity to address individual concerns.

Commission function/history

- There was a lengthy discussion on the Commission’s makeup, purpose and role in the past as opposed to its current function and mission (shifting from an operational to an advisory body). Dave Hampton volunteered to research the official history of the Commission and provide a report at the December meeting.
- Commissioner Ellis said that Commissioners were quite active in the past when ADVS had important legislation in process. Activity will undoubtedly increase markedly from January through May next year, during the legislative session.
- Chairman Dingwall said the Commission’s work will increase when the Agency starts work on funding for the Tucson Home and asked Director Maxon when that activity should start. Director Maxon speculated the discrepancy between the US House and Senate’s budgets would be resolved by December.

Recently Discharged Veterans

- Director Maxon asked for Commission’s advice on how to more effectively engage the Unified Arizona Veterans’ (UAV) in one specific area. UAV is made up of the senior leadership of the various veterans’ organizations operating in Arizona and are in an excellent position to support reservists returning from active duty. The agency needs a way to identify returning military personnel and to inform them of their rights and potential entitlements.
- Chairman Dingwall suggested this issue be made an agenda item for a future meeting. He also suggested that the Commissioners develop some ideas on this matter to offer Director Maxon at the next meeting.

Regional Meetings

- Commissioner Fulkerson is ready for the November 3rd meeting in Lake Havasu. She and Commissioner Lunsford conducted a site visit in September. A list of local dignitaries was provided to Mona Engler for personal invitations to be prepared.

- Commissioner McKim said the January Regional meeting in Sierra Vista was also on track. Hotel information and the location of the American Legion hall were given to Judy Smith. Many local dignitaries have expressed interest and plan to attend the meeting.
- Commissioner Ellis noted that the Region 2 meeting is scheduled for March. It may be advantageous to reschedule the March outreach meeting to April in light of pressing business. The weather should be more hospitable as well.

Commission meeting schedule

- Meetings for the next seven months will be held as follows:

Nov. 3 rd	Lake Havasu outreach visit
Dec. 13 th	Home, Phoenix
Jan. 12 th	Sierra Vista outreach visit
Feb. 14 th	Home, Phoenix
Mar. 13 th	Home, Phoenix
Apr. 12 th	(site to be determined) Region 2 outreach visit
May 8 th	Home, Phoenix

Hall of Fame

- Commissioner Fredericks advised that the Governor has selected the 20 new inductees for the Arizona Hall of Fame. Reservations for the induction ceremony and lunch are available on the ADVS website.

Open discussion / Call to the Public

- Robert "Bo" Bohach congratulated Sierra Vista for having 3 people selected for the Veterans Hall of Fame.

Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m. by acclamation. The next regular meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on November 3, 2007 at American Legion Post 81, 181 Paseo Del Sol Ave, Lake Havasu City Arizona.

Respectfully submitted,

S. Lee Borgen
Acting recorder